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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

NATIONAL SECURITY AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

B-212168

NOVEMBER 10, 1983

The Honorable John O. Marsh, Jr.
The Secretary of the Army



122793

Attention: The Inspector General DAIG-AI

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Better Followup Can Reduce Equipment and
Facility Problems Affecting Army Guard
and Reserve Training (GAO/NSIAD-84-29)

The Joint Chiefs of Staff require each of the services to report the current status of their active and reserve component units and, accordingly, established the Unit Status and Identity Report. To satisfy this requirement, the Army established the Unit Status Reporting (USR) system. The USR is the primary means of tracking Army National Guard and Army Reserve units' ability to train. USR ratings are intended to show whether units are capable of performing their missions and to identify resource shortfalls that prevent units from meeting their training objectives.

It is well known that many Army Guard and Reserve units do not have all of their authorized equipment. Ideally, each unit should have enough equipment to satisfy its training requirements. Furthermore, for the equipment on hand to be of most value, units must have good access to training facilities.

In conducting this review, we wanted to find out whether (1) equipment shortages and constraints on access to training facilities adversely affect Guard and Reserve units' ability to train and (2) the Army has an effective means for identifying and correcting reported training problems. To meet our objectives, we visited six Guard and Reserve units and discussed followup procedures with Army officials throughout the chain of command. Our findings are summarized below and are discussed in detail, along with our objectives, scope, and methodology, in the enclosure:

--USR information is inconsistent or incomplete. Recent USRs show that equipment shortages and problems in gaining access to training facilities have a major impact on units' ability to meet training objectives. We found that

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because instructions for preparing USRs are not clear, commanders must exercise considerable judgment in completing the USRs. As a result, the reported information is inconsistent. For example, even though two Guard battalions we visited both had problems gaining access to a training facility, one battalion classified the impact on training as major, the other minor. In some cases, we found that major impact classifications were not justified because training objectives had been achieved.

Also, some commanders are not listing on the USRs all the equipment shortages or facility constraints affecting their training. Accordingly, the true extent of the training problem is unknown. (See pp. 5 and 6 of the encl.)

--Followup on reported training problems is minimal.

Followup on reported training problems is minimal because Army officials, especially those at higher command levels, (1) do not analyze USR training data to assess the magnitude of reported problems due to equipment shortages or facility constraints and (2) lack confidence in the validity of reported training problems. Although units receive new or displaced equipment based on deployment dates, training requirements can be used to influence equipment allocation decisions. (See pp. 7 to 9 of the encl.)

CONCLUSIONS

The Army's inadequate followup on reported equipment and facility conditions that adversely affect Guard and Reserve training allows some valid training problems to remain unresolved. Although we did not determine the extent of questionable training impact classifications throughout the Army, we believe that inadequate criteria for classifying impact is a fundamental weakness that should be corrected. Furthermore, if the USR is to become useful for initiating corrective actions, commanders must completely fill out the report (for example, by identifying the specific equipment item that is the source of the training problem). Accordingly, the Army must do a better job of enforcing existing requirements to ensure that all required information is reported.

Once these actions are completed and the USR is providing valid and complete information, the Army should use the USR to assist in making decisions on equipment allocations, which take into account training requirements in addition to operational requirements. We are not suggesting that training requirements are any more or less important than the other factors used in allocating equipment. Rather, we are suggesting that training

requirements should receive appropriate consideration in the equipment allocation process. For example, rather than assign an equipment item to meet operational requirements of one unit, it may be better to place that item in a central location if, by doing so, it could be shared by many units to overcome major training problems. On the other hand, because of the relative priorities of the units involved, the Army may decide that the importance of the one unit's operational capability outweighs the training requirements of the other units and, in this case, the equipment could be given to the unit with the higher priority. In any event, we believe that the quality of the decisionmaking process would be improved if consideration is given to valid and reliable information on training requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Secretary of the Army:

- Develop and implement criteria for classifying the training impact of equipment shortages and facility constraints and follow up to ensure that the criteria are used correctly.
- Emphasize the importance of completing all information required by the USR.
- Use USR data for following up on problems having a major training impact and making cross-leveling decisions at each level of command.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

The Department of Defense agreed with our first recommendation. It said that the Army will review existing regulations governing USR and, if necessary, determine a better way to define and establish training standards and requirements upon which unit training status ratings can be based.

Defense also agreed with our second recommendation and said that the Army will continue to reemphasize the necessity to complete all information required in the USR.

Concerning our recommendation that the Army use USR data for followup on problems having a major training impact, Defense said this is already being accomplished and cited several procedures used to influence decisions on the allocation of new and displaced equipment. It said that commands at all levels review and comment on the USR. We agree that various command levels review and comment on the USR; however, as pointed out on page 7 of the enclosure, followup is done only at the subordinate command level and then only on a case-by-case basis. None of the command

levels aggregate USR data to identify the magnitude of reported training problems or the specific kinds of equipment and facility constraints causing the training problem. This would be a necessary first step before effective followup could take place at higher commands.

Defense also referred to other mechanisms, such as the New Equipment Training Plan, used to influence equipment allocations to the Reserve components. We agree that these mechanisms are available; however, they are not used in response to training problems reported on the USR. For example, the New Equipment Training Plan is the system used for training users, supporters, and trainers to operate and maintain the new equipment distributed to units.

Defense also disagreed with a proposed recommendation in our draft report that training requirements be added to the exceptions on the Department of the Army's Master Priority List (DAMPL) because training requirements are already a recognized exception to the DAMPL. We reviewed documents provided by Army officials supporting this position and have deleted the proposal from this report.

As pointed out in the documents provided, requests for equipment out of DAMPL sequence are to be submitted through command channels and only for items that prevent the unit from being declared mission capable. However, we found that officials at the State and Army command levels responsible for monitoring unit readiness were unaware of the DAMPL exception procedures. These officials also said they had not received requests from units for equipment out of DAMPL sequence.

Additionally, Defense did not agree with statements in the draft report that Army officials at higher command levels lacked confidence in the validity of problems reported in the USR. Defense pointed out that Army procedures provided for, at a minimum, a semiannual briefing on the overall readiness of the Army Guard and Reserve to the Army Chief of Staff and Commanding General, U.S. Army Forces Command, based upon USR data. We agree that USR data is used for readiness briefings; however, this does not negate the fact that command officials responsible for followup on USRs told us they lacked confidence in the validity of reported training problems.

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As you know, 31 U.S.C. 720 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations. This written statement must be submitted to

the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report. A written statement must also be submitted to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with an agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Subcommittees on Defense, House and Senate Committees on Appropriations; Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel, Senate Committee on Armed Services; Subcommittee on Personnel and Compensation, House Committee on Armed Services; the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank C. Conahan".

Frank C. Conahan
Director

Enclosure

BETTER FOLLOWUP CAN REDUCE EQUIPMENT
AND FACILITY PROBLEMS AFFECTING ARMY
GUARD AND RESERVE TRAINING

BACKGROUND

Of the approximately 5,000 Guard and Reserve units, about 65 percent prepare USRs. The USR system requires commanders to rate their units' readiness in each of four categories: personnel, equipment on-hand, equipment status and readiness, and training. In addition, commanders provide an overall rating based on their judgment of the unit's combat capability, considering all of the categories collectively. Ratings range from C-1 (fully ready) to C-5 (not ready, programmed).

The training readiness rating represents a commander's estimate of the number of additional weeks it would take for the unit to become fully trained to perform its mission. In arriving at this estimate, a commander considers a number of factors, including (1) proficiency shown by the unit during recent tests and evaluations, (2) unit capability to perform a full range of missions, and (3) unit ability to operate in a Nuclear, Biological, Chemical (NBC) environment. One evaluation of unit proficiency is the Army Training and Evaluation Program, which tests performance of various tasks against prescribed timeframes and accuracy standards. The ability to meet these standards is affected by numerous factors, including how qualified unit personnel are in their military occupational specialties.

Instructions for preparing the training readiness portion of the USR require commanders to classify the training impact of equipment shortages and accessibility constraints to training facilities as follows: insignificant, minor, major, or prohibits maintaining a satisfactory training status.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to determine (1) whether equipment shortages and constraints on access to training facilities adversely affect Guard and Reserve units' ability to achieve training objectives and (2) whether the Army has an effective means for identifying and correcting reported training problems.

To accomplish our objectives, we first analyzed April 1982 nationwide USR training data (the latest available at the time of our review) to determine the extent to which units reported a major effect on training resulting from equipment shortages and accessibility constraints to training facilities. To gain a thorough understanding of the reported problems' impact and to assess whether units were reporting valid information, we visited or telephoned the following units:

- 1st Squadron, 26th Cavalry, Massachusetts Army National Guard; Reading, Massachusetts.
- 1st Battalion, 110th Armor; Massachusetts Army National Guard; Worcester, Massachusetts.
- 1st Battalion, 102d Field Artillery, Massachusetts Army National Guard; Lynn, Massachusetts.
- 2d Battalion, 110th Field Artillery, Maryland Army National Guard; Pikesville, Maryland.
- 101st Engineer Battalion, Massachusetts Army National Guard; Reading, Massachusetts.
- 329th Engineer Group, U.S. Army Reserve, Brockton, Massachusetts.

Information obtained from these units is not projectable to the universe of Guard and Reserve units or to all artillery, armor, and engineer units.

We selected artillery, armor, and engineer units to review because our analysis of the USR indicated that these types of units frequently reported major training problems. To evaluate the validity of reports, we selected pairs of units, by type, and discussed with unit training officials the specifics of how the equipment or facility problems affected unit training. We complemented our analysis of USR data and work at selected units with information collected by a Department of Defense contractor--the Rand Corporation--during a 1979 survey of Army Guard and Reserve units. Results from the Rand survey provided unit commanders' and enlisted members' perspectives about factors affecting unit training, including facility-related problems.

We reviewed instructions and criteria applicable to completing USRs and, at each unit, we discussed with training officials (1) the basis for their classifications of training impact and (2) the adequacy of criteria available for deciding the classification; that is, major, minor, etc.

To evaluate Army followup procedures to correct reported training problems, we held discussions with officials at Army and National Guard Bureau headquarters and the Office of the Chief Army Reserve, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia; First U.S. Army, Fort Meade, Maryland; subordinate commands; and selected units. We inquired specifically about followup and corrective actions taken on problems reported by the six units selected for this review. We also inquired

about the procedures followed to inform higher commands of problems that could not be corrected by subordinate commands. In addition, we reviewed the Army's equipment distribution/redistribution criteria.

We conducted our work between April 1982 and March 1983 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

INFORMATION ON EQUIPMENT AND FACILITY
TRAINING PROBLEMS IS INCONSISTENT AND INCOMPLETE

Of the more than 3,000 Army National Guard and Army Reserve units submitting USRs in April 1982, 17 percent said that equipment shortages had a major impact on their ability to meet training objectives. Five percent of the units reported a major impact on training due to accessibility constraints to training facilities. Our field work at the six units, however, showed that, in some cases, information reported on the USR was inconsistent. Accordingly, the true extent of the training problem is uncertain. In addition, we found that the utility of training information is hampered by incomplete reporting.

Inconsistent reporting

Instructions for preparing USRs do not provide guidelines for classifying the training impact of equipment shortages and constraints on access to training facilities. As a result, commanders must exercise considerable judgment in completing the reports, which, we found, results in inconsistencies in reported information.

At each of the six units reviewed, we inquired about the rationale used by commanders in classifying the training impact. Results of these inquiries follow.

We reviewed two Guard armor battalions that appeared to have a similar training problem resulting from poor access to facilities but reported the training impact differently. The two battalions travel to Fort Drum, New York, during 1 weekend each year for annual tank gunnery qualification. Officials of both units consider transportation time involved--approximately 8 hours each way--to be a problem because it severely limits available training time. Although both unit commanders told us that the units accomplished their tank gunnery qualification objectives, one commander classified the training impact as major because of the effect of travel time on training time available and troop morale. The other commander considered travel time a minor problem because the necessary training was, in fact, accomplished.

At another pair of units (artillery), one unit reported a major training impact and the other an insignificant impact due to equipment shortages. Officials at the first unit cited a shortage of radio communications equipment as the reason for classifying the training impact as major. Unit officials said that additional radios are needed to conduct full-scale command and control exercises. They stated, however, that they have borrowed radios from another artillery battalion when the two battalions were training at different times and, therefore, were able to conduct full-scale exercises. According to unit officials, the unit was able to meet training objectives.

The second artillery unit classified the training impact of its equipment shortage as insignificant. Because the assigned personnel strength of the unit was less than 60 percent of authorized strength, unit officials said that enough equipment was available to achieve training objectives. They pointed out, however, that as personnel strength levels improve, equipment shortages will have a greater impact on training. As discussed on page 6 of this enclosure, however, unit commanders are to measure training impact against their ability to perform their full mission. Accordingly, for purposes of classifying training impact, the commander should have assumed that the unit was at full personnel strength.

Engineer units classify training impact correctly

The two engineer units we visited classified the training impact of their equipment shortages differently. In each case, however, the reported training impact appeared valid. One unit had shortages of bridge erection boats, NBC equipment, and camouflage sets. The unit reported the impact of these shortages on training as minor, primarily because the unit was able to either use substitute equipment or borrow the equipment needed to achieve training objectives.

The other engineer unit classified the impact of equipment shortages on training as major. In this case, in addition to shortages of NBC equipment and camouflage sets, the unit was also short certain radio communications equipment. Unit officials explained that the collective impact of these shortages formed the basis for their classifying the impact on training as major. Officials pointed out, however, that the radio shortage was the primary factor in this decision. They explained that, as a result of the shortage, the unit could not provide enough training for command and control operations, which are essential to the unit's performance capability.

Incomplete reporting

Instructions for completing USRs require that commanders indicate the degree to which various resource constraints affect units' ability to achieve and sustain training objectives. Unit commanders are to comment on the problems if their training rating is less than the unit's Authorized Level of Organization (ALO). The ALO, which is expressed numerically (ALO 1, 2, 3, or 4), establishes the authorized strength and equipment levels for units. Thus, an ALO 1 unit is authorized to have its full complement of required personnel and equipment. ALO 2, 3, and 4 units are authorized fewer amounts of required personnel and equipment. In the case of a unit which is, for example, ALO 2, the commander would include comments on the USR if the training readiness rating is less than C-2.

Unit commanders are also to comment on the problems when one or more of the training resource factors (equipment, for example) is causing more than an insignificant impact on training. Comments should describe the essential training that could not be accomplished because of a lack of training resources. Not all unit commanders, however, are complying with these instructions.

The types of units that most frequently reported major training impacts associated with equipment shortages (see p.2 of this encl.) were engineer, infantry, combat support and artillery. Our analysis of the almost 200 of these units submitting such reports showed that

--96 (or 48 percent) did not identify the specific shortage item affecting training and

--140 (or 70 percent) did not describe the degree to which the shortage affected training.

In addition, our analysis of all 159 units reporting that training facility constraints had a major training impact, showed that 26 (or 16 percent) did not disclose the specific condition causing the problem and 113 (or 71 percent) did not describe the training effect.

None of the six units we reviewed had listed on the USRs all the equipment shortages or facility constraints affecting their training. Officials generally did not have specific reasons for not providing complete lists; however, in two instances, the incompleteness appears to be based on a misinterpretation of the Army's instructions.

Training officials at one artillery battalion said they list on the USR only those equipment problems that affect their ability to train to their ALO. The Chief of the Readiness Team, Mobilization Readiness Division, National Guard Bureau, told us that this was not a correct interpretation of Army instructions and that unit commanders should also provide comments if any of the training resource factors have more than an insignificant impact on training.

The other artillery battalion we visited also appears to have interpreted the instructions incorrectly. The unit's April 1982 USR cited accessibility constraints to training facilities as having a major impact. According to unit officials, it takes 3 hours to reach ranges where the unit can fire weapons using live ammunition. Given the limited time available for training on a weekend, officials believe that such extensive travel time is a major problem.

Despite no change in the accessibility of facilities, the unit classified the problem as minor in its January 1983 report. Officials explained that they downgraded training impact in their subsequent report because the unit was heavily involved in other than live fire training during the particular calendar quarter covered by the USR. Unit officials interpreted reporting requirements to include only training problems actually encountered during the reporting period.

During the next calendar quarter, the unit again expects to report a major training impact because it is scheduled to have live firing exercises. The Chief of the Readiness Team told us that this unit's interpretation of the reporting requirement is incorrect. He said that, although not specifically covered in the instruction, if a unit has encountered a training problem in the past that will definitely be encountered again, it should be reported on the USR. Otherwise it would appear, from a review of the USR, that the problem had been resolved when, in fact, it had not.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF ACCESSIBILITY CONSTRAINTS TO TRAINING FACILITIES

The results of a 1979 Rand Corporation survey provided further evidence that facility constraints affect unit training. Under contract for the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, Rand conducted a comprehensive survey of over 400 Army Guard and Reserve units and their members to evaluate and improve Reserve Force personnel and recruiting policies.

Unit commanders were asked to identify which of 16 problem areas were the first and second most serious problems affecting their units' ability to meet training objectives. Almost 22 percent of the 358 unit commanders responding to these questions cited poor access to good training facilities as the first or second most serious problem. About 10 percent cited poor access to good training facilities as the most serious problem, and 12 percent cited this accessibility problem as the second most serious problem. This area was among the three most frequently cited as causing serious problems.

Enlisted members in grades E-5 to E-9 were also asked the same questions relative to 15 problem areas. Poor access to good training facilities was cited as the first or second most serious problem by 18 percent of the over 11,500 enlisted personnel who responded to these questions, thus ranking among the top four problems cited.

The Rand study did not list equipment shortages as a problem area.

MINIMAL FOLLOWUP OF REPORTED TRAINING PROBLEMS

The training section of the USR is specifically intended to identify resources, such as equipment, needed by units to achieve their training objectives. We found, however, that the Army's use of USR information to identify and follow up on problems is minimal. The major factors contributing to this condition are (1) insufficient analysis of USR data to assess the magnitude of training problems resulting from equipment shortages or facility constraints and (2) lack of confidence by Army officials at higher command levels in the validity of reported problems.

We discussed the equipment shortages identified in our unit visits (see pp 3. through 6 of the encl.) with State National Guard headquarters and Army Command officials to determine what courses of action they had pursued to resolve the problems. These officials told us that they follow up on reported problems on a case-by-case basis and, when possible, "cross level" equipment among units. Cross leveling involves taking or borrowing an item of equipment from one unit and giving it to another. They pointed out, however, that the equipment shortages of units we visited were items that were generally short Army-wide and, therefore, their only course of action was to requisition the equipment.

We discussed with FORSCOM and Army National Guard training officials what followup action they take on major training problems identified in USRs. These officials informed us that they

do not follow up on reported problems. They said that, while cross leveling equipment is a potential solution, they do not use this method to resolve equipment-related training problems identified on the USRs. They questioned the validity of the reported data and said that the report is very subjective and were concerned that the unit commander's comments often did not support or explain the commander's ratings.

We also discussed followup procedures and available remedies with officials in the Offices of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations (DCSOPS) and Logistics (DCSLOG). DCSOPS officials responsible for training told us they receive USR data in summary form and that they do not analyze USR data to determine the number of units whose training is affected by equipment shortages or facility constraints. These officials explained that subordinate commands are responsible for supervising training at the unit level and for following up on reported training problems and that they do not get involved in micromanagement of the units. Also, if subordinate commands are unable to resolve training problems locally through cross leveling, they can request the allocation of new or displaced equipment out of DAMPL sequence. They said that DCSLOG makes decisions involving the initial allocation of new and displaced equipment.

DCSLOG officials informed us that DAMPL is the Army's system for determining which units will receive new or displaced equipment first. These priorities are based upon the date the unit arrives at its deployment location. However, among the recognized exceptions for allocating equipment out of DAMPL sequence are training requirements. DCSLOG officials, however, informed us that actions to resolve reported training problems would have to be initiated by DCSOPS.

Inadequate followup on reported equipment shortages allows problems having a major training impact to remain unresolved. For example, at one of the armor units visited, higher commands did not follow up on problems affecting three distinct aspects of the unit's training. This unit had shortages of communications equipment, night-vision goggles, and NBC equipment. The commander told us that the shortage of communications equipment limited the unit's ability to practice proper communication procedures and countermeasures. The unit could not operate sufficient communication nets, causing communications overload and affecting command and control capability. The commander stated that it would take several weeks of training for operators to become proficient with the equipment's electronic countermeasure capabilities.

The commander also pointed out that because of the shortage of night-vision goggles, the unit could not conduct realistic training exercises at night, which is extremely important because the unit is expected to perform advance scouting missions. In addition, due to the lack of NBC equipment for decontaminating equipment or areas, the commander said that unit personnel receive awareness training only. He estimated that, if given required equipment, the unit would need about 2 years to train sufficiently to survive an NBC environment under battlefield conditions.

Because the Army does not aggregate reported equipment training problems, it does not attempt to identify units whose training is adversely affected by the same equipment shortages. We found shortages of communications equipment at four units, NBC equipment at five units, and night-vision goggles at three units. All of these units were located within a 50-mile radius of an equipment concentration site at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Fort Devens also did not have any of these equipment items. Equipment concentration sites (Army Reserve) and mobilization and training equipment sites (Army National Guard) are locations where equipment can be stored and made available to units for training. Over 45 such sites are located throughout the country.